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May 21, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

As millions of Americans look to honor our nation's fallen this Memorial Day, I write to you today to request that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reconsider their decision not to allow the "mass placement and retrieval of gravesite flags by any groups," as stated on the National Cemetery Administration's (NCA) website.

I urge you to reconsider the complete prohibition on placement and retrieval of flags by any groups and instead allow each individual NCA cemetery to consult with their own state and local health officials to determine what would be the best practice for their own individual community. Not every community is experiencing the same level of COVID-19 cases and many states continue to reopen allowing people to go visit parks, beaches, and restaurants over this holiday weekend. Just as I'm asking my own Governor to reopen the State of Illinois on a regional basis, I'm asking you take those same principles into account when implementing this policy.

Instead of a blanket, one-size-fits-all rule, the VA should empower each cemetery to work with their local health departments and make their own decisions while adhering to CDC guidelines, including all visitors maintaining a safe social distance. Contrary to the NCA's website, it is possible for a group of people to socially distance and follow CDC guidelines in a National Cemetery.

Placing flags at each veterans' gravesite is an important symbol of a grateful nation and we should allow this tradition to continue in a safe manor. I would ask that your administration work to provide guidance to help cemeteries across the nation continue to honor our fallen this Memorial Day. Thank you for your attention to this vitally important matter.

Sincerely,



Rodney Davis
Member of Congress (IL-13)

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